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ABSTRACT

A study attempted to determine if block scheduling in secondary schools affected curriculum and student achievement in English courses. Interviews were conducted with 22 teachers, 4 principals and 1 former principal; questionnaires were collected from 44 students. Of these, 10 teachers, 3 principals, and 23 students were in schools with rotating block schedules; the others were in a normal block schedule. A block schedule consists of four 90-minute periods a day, rather than seven or eight 50-minute periods. A rotating block schedule consists of four 90-minute periods a day but retains the traditional schedule's eight period cycle; in other words, it takes two days--four periods in each day--to complete one cycle. While it was difficult to determine student performance under the block system, results showed that most of the teachers interviewed (90%) like the 90-minute periods. The most satisfaction seems to be with the rotating block schedule because the pace is less hectic. Also, most of the students questioned believed that they have improved in their ability to write. The results were mixed on students' perceptions about their improvement in overall achievement in English and in their ability to read and understand literature. However, even those who do not believe their abilities have necessarily improved under the block system said they would like to see it retained. (Evaluation questions are attached, as are sections on personal and electronic and print resources.) (TB)

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Perceived Effects of Block Scheduling on the Teaching of English

Report prepared
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Perceived Effects of Block Scheduling on the Teaching of English

Summary

Question: How has block scheduling affected curriculum and student achievement in English courses?

Related questions:
What factors led to implementation of a block schedule in your school?
What factors appear to be related to successful implementation of the schedule?

Method: Interviews with twenty-two teachers, four building principals and one former building principal; questionnaires collected from forty-four students. Ten teachers, three principals, and twenty-three students were in schools with a rotating block schedule; the remaining teachers and administrators were associated with a school on a traditional block schedule. I received additional comments from teachers who are on English Teachers listserv or on CompuServe and from teachers and department chairs who attended a national conference on teaching English. They are represented as resources and as background information but are not represented in any of the statistical measures.

Findings:
- The majority of teachers (estimated 90%) like the 90-minute periods.
- The most satisfaction seems to be with a rotating block schedule (defined in the report) because the pace is "less hectic."
- Those who like the traditional block schedule cite the advantage of accelerated learning.
- The majority of students believe that they have improved in their ability to write. The results are mixed on students' perceived improvement in overall achievement in English and in the ability to read and understand literature. Even those who do not believe their ability has improved like the schedule they are on and urge that it be retained.
- There are identifiable factors for successful implementation: inservice, careful study, community involvement.
- Teachers who are best able to change are flexible, believe that "less is more," and are able to reconceptualize curriculum.

The report:
Besides expanding on the overview, the following report contains comments from teachers, students and administrators; reasons that these schools changed; questions for evaluating the change; and resources for further information.

Perceived Effects of Block Scheduling on the Teaching of English
Full Report

A major school reform initiative is block scheduling. In the three years that I taught in a high school that had changed its schedule, we were visited by more than 85 teams from other schools who were interested in the program. Another school in Colorado has had so many visitors that they have limited the times available to two Mondays a month.

Schools change for any number of reasons—administrative directive; perceived benefits for teachers, students and curriculum; or a need to change from "business as usual." But change is seldom studied. It is implemented and, perhaps, modified, before becoming the new version of "business as usual." As I learned more about various schedules and, as I had a chance to objectively examine the schedule at my previous school after I left there, I began to wonder if there were measurable benefits of block schedules for teaching English. Additionally, in 1994, the NCTE Commission on Composition issued a statement that concerned me. They viewed "with alarm the trend to reduce instruction in English in secondary schools to one semester. Programs known variously as concentrated curriculum, block scheduling, or flex scheduling may sometimes be good in theory (in that they enable collaboration, longer-term focus, and more use of process pedagogy), but too often they compress and weaken writing instruction." I wanted to know if that was the perception of those who taught and learned under such schedules.

So, I interviewed teachers, students, and administrators in four Colorado high schools who are using some form of block schedule. In addition, I asked for comments from teachers who were on either the English Teachers listserv or on CompuServe. Because this study was undertaken under the auspices of Colorado State University, I had to guarantee anonymity to the participants from the four high schools. Many of the other teachers agreed to have me pass on their names as resources; that list is at the end of this report.

The comments that I received highlight one of the difficulties of educational research. It is hard to get meaningful data about products. It makes sense that teachers are far more willing to discuss processes—schedules and curriculum that affect them daily—than products, but I was not able to conclude *statistically* that the Commission on Composition was unnecessarily alarmed. However, most English teachers and students that I interviewed would say that writing instruction has improved under block schedules. Furthermore, they cite numerous other advantages, both affective and cognitive, for such schedules.

A move to block scheduling affects more than one department. Thus, as I talked to people who use such schedules, I heard about the disadvantages that some other

departments, primarily vocal music, foreign language, and math, perceived. On the other hand, there were some teachers who said that the teachers of those subjects in their schools loved the schedule. Because I was interested most in how change had occurred and how it affected the teaching and learning of English, I have focused on those questions for this report.

Finding Time to Think

"Learning in America is a prisoner of time," begins the report of the National Education Commission on Time and Learning. The report continues, "For the past 150 years, American public schools have held time constant and let learning vary. The rule, only rarely voiced, is simple: learn what you can in the time we make available" (7).

As knowledge and information become more prolific and complex, school people are finding that old structures just don't work. Teachers feel that they cannot be effective with 175 students per day, dividing knowledge into 42-minute segments (the average time period, according to the Commission on Time and Learning). As the emphasis moves from tasks demanding skill development to tasks requiring critical thinking, more time is needed. But how can we efficiently "buy time"?

Time and quality

The Commission's report continues, "Harnessed then, in the public mind, are two powerful forces for reform: a belief that the paramount issue in American education is quality and a dawning consensus, just now being articulated, that school time, broadly conceived, is quality's ally" (13).

To address quality, districts, states, and national organizations are formulating content standards that articulate what students should know and be able to do. While the commission supports efforts such as Goals 2000, they found five unresolved issues related to time that must be overcome if learning is to be improved:

- The fixed clock and calendar is a fundamental design flaw that must be changed.
- Academic time has been stolen to make room for a host of nonacademic activities.
- Today's school schedule must be modified to respond to the great changes that have reshaped American life outside school.
- Educators do not have the time they need to do their job properly.
- Mastering world-class standards will require more time for almost all students. (13)

One of the commission's recommendations is that "state and local boards work with schools to redesign education so that time becomes a factor supporting learning, not a boundary marking its limits" (31). To achieve that, they suggest among other things, that "Block scheduling—the use of two or more periods for extended exploration of complex topics or for science laboratories—should become more common" (31). A second recommendation that applies to this topic is "Give teachers the time they need" (36). This one is complicated, of course, and they are opposed to sending students

home for teacher inservice days, saying that teachers' needs should not be met at the expense of students' needs. But I think that schools that use block or modified block schedules have moved toward making learning the constant and time the variable; they have moved toward finding time to think.

What does a block schedule look like?

There are all kinds of scheduling configurations. And, there are many ways to incorporate blocks of time into a regular academic day. The sources I list give more information on a variety of ways. But in this study I focused on just two kinds of block schedules offered in high schools. [One of the rotating block schedules had a variation where teachers met all seven classes one day a week; their answers to my questions and the students' answers to the questionnaire addressed primarily the 90-minute periods so I have not separated those responses from the others.] There are a couple of reasons for my focus.

I was a member of a high school faculty that decided to go to a modified block schedule, so I know some of the advantages and disadvantages firsthand. Teaching under such a schedule made me want to study it some day; *I* liked it, but were there measurable benefits?

Second, I interviewed 22 English teachers and administrators in four Colorado high schools in the fall of 1994 about their schedule and its effect on the teaching of English. Schools ranged in size from 550 to 1850 students and all were suburban or rural. The schools had used their new schedule for two to five years and all but one had a modified block schedule. I have interviews with ten teachers total from two schools with modified block schedules and with twelve teachers from one school with a block schedule. I didn't formally interview teachers in the fourth school because I was department chair and taught with them just two years ago. We had numerous conversations about the schedule as we were implementing it. Furthermore, I had written comments that they had available for distribution to visiting teams.

Forty-four students in three schools voluntarily filled out questionnaires. Three were sophomores; the rest were juniors and seniors who had experienced their schedule for at least two years. I would have preferred more student response, but I think that the requirement that their parents had to give permission discouraged volunteers. Another difficulty in some schools was that students (and parents, teachers and administrators) had already been surveyed sometimes more than once on the same topic.

Traditional Schedule

When I refer to a traditional schedule, I'm consolidating the variations into one definition. Generally, I mean a schedule where students take 6, 7 or 8 classes, teachers teach 5 or 6, and each class meets every day, usually for a semester or a year. Class periods range from 42 to 55 minutes.

Block or Traditional Block Schedule
Students have four classes a day, each one lasting 90 minutes. Teachers teach 3 classes and have one 90-minute planning period each day. Courses which last a semester on a traditional schedule last only a quarter on a block schedule. Some modifications can be made to accommodate classes that want to meet daily, but they are made within the structure of a 90-minute block.

Modified or Rotating Block Schedule
Students have four classes a day, each one lasting 90 minutes, but they still have an eight-period schedule. Think of it as an eight-period day spread over two days with the days continually rotating. Periods 1 through 4 meet one day; periods 5 through 8 meet the next; and so on. Schedules of this type that I know of usually have an advisement period built in so students are taking only 7 classes plus their advisement. Teachers teach 5 classes and have one group of advisees. Thus, they teach three classes or two classes plus advisement and have a 90-minute planning period each day. Semester courses on a traditional schedule remain semester courses on a modified block schedule.

A variation using six periods was suggested to me by a teacher on the east coast. Her school's schedule provides three periods a day for students; students take six classes over two days. The blocks are 105 minutes each and teachers have a planning period one of the days. In addition, school ends for students at 2:05 and teachers have until 3:00 for common planning time, meetings, etc. each day. So, one day teachers have 105 minutes plus 55 minutes after school and the other day they have just the 55 minutes.

Why adopt a new schedule?
There were a number of reasons that people gave me for changing their schedules.
•Change was in the air. There was a lot of talk about school reform and this was one reform that looked interesting and applicable. In one building the former principal had spent a sabbatical year looking at excellent high schools to identify the common threads and, when he told the staff about his findings, they wanted to find ways to implement some of the programs and approaches he had found.
•School administrators wanted to provide opportunities for students to take more classes.
•They wanted to make learning the constant and time the variable.
•They wanted to provide more focus for students. There was a sense that students lead pretty fragmented lives and that, while more class options is good, doing them all in one day is not.
•They wanted to provide more planning time for teachers. There was some recognition that teachers, too, lead fragmented lives and would appreciate time to focus. In addition, schools in Colorado, at least, are facing the dilemma of an increasing population on a decreasing tax base since the passage of a tax limitation measure and

the general anti-tax tone of the public. They needed to find a way to maintain services without depleting resources.

•The school with a block schedule also saw the opportunity to accelerate students. For example, with a traditional schedule, a student who had not been in advanced math in 7th grade had no chance to work her way into calculus as a senior. A student who realized in his junior year that he needed three years of a foreign language for the college of his choice was out of luck. With a block schedule that offers a one-year course in a semester, the math and language students could accelerate their program and take the advanced courses before graduation.

•The impetus for one school's change was a central office mandate that all students would take seven classes rather than six. The staff looked around at the seven-period schedules at other schools and did not like what they saw. So, they sent out teams of teachers to look at schools around the state for something better.

•Some schools wanted to provide an advisement program in response to a changing society. During one of their eight periods, students would be assigned to one teacher for four years. That time could be used for students to go to other teachers to get homework or help on assignments or make up tests. It could be used for standardized testing instead of taking time away from class. Teachers would hand out report cards and be what one teacher called "academic parents." Schools who have implemented an advisement period also wanted to increase student responsibility for their own learning.

•Over and over, students, teachers and administrators said a variation of "It seems less frantic." Block and modified block schedules seem to reduce stress.

Factors for Successful Change

Change, on the other hand, does *not* reduce stress. I asked about factors that helped make the change less stressful and, therefore, more lasting.

•Most schools had teams of teachers and, occasionally students, go look at other schedules and bring back information to the faculty. In addition, most faculties voted on the schedule, selecting among two or three. Some schools studied for a few months, others for a year. Some had extensive inservices, others none. Some schools would recommend that all stakeholders—teachers, students, parents, administrators—be on the visiting teams. Doing this assures everyone that this is something that has been researched, not a spur of the moment idea.

•Most of the schools were in districts that had some degree of site-based decision making. In fact, none of the districts has all schools on the same schedule. Individual schools have decided what will work best for them.

•Most administrators thought that preparing teachers for the change was essential. Those who had not had inservice activities wished they had. Three of the most valuable activities cited by principals who had prepared teachers were

•an inservice on the change process which asked teachers to group themselves as either dreamers, detail people, people persons or "my way or the highway." Afterwards, they understood the needs of people in each group and could better understand and deal with the inevitable conflicts that arose in the implementation of the schedule.
•inservices on teaching techniques such as cooperative learning strategies. Teachers who were comfortable lecturing needed to know how to employ additional methods.
•an inservice where teachers from schools already using a block schedule talked to department members about successful activities for 90-minute classes. Teachers in every school mentioned the value, the absolute necessity, of having English teachers come to talk to English teachers.
•one teacher said than an inservice with other English teachers *after* the new schedule had been in place for a semester would be helpful; teachers on the new schedule would have more specific questions to ask the teachers who had experienced a similar schedule.

Easing into change
Ways to ease into change:

•provide common planning periods for departments the first year
•adopt the modified block plan because it would be possible to change back mid-year, but that would not be possible with a traditional block
•set it up as a pilot; change is more palatable if it doesn't seem permanent or capricious

Involving people outside the school
I asked administrators about how they had involved the community in the change. One school in the state has had serious challenges from school board members and parents who do not like the change at all and I wondered what other districts or schools had done to prevent that from happening to them.

Principals consistently said that anyone considering such a change should involve parents, even though most thought they hadn't done enough. They emphasized the need for information throughout the process.

One principal noted that we need to be aware that some people perceive any change as an attempt to reduce quality. Therefore, change agents must show parents how this is an improvement—basics plus, a value-added education.

Characteristics of people who like the schedule
I also asked teachers and administrators about the people who like block schedules. They identified two major qualities. First, block schedules work best for teachers who are flexible. Changes in procedures necessarily occur along with the change in

scheduling. In addition, some changes in curriculum are necessary; flexible teachers are able to see the advantages of the schedule past the disadvantages of the change process.

Second, block schedules work for teachers who are able to reconceptualize the curriculum. They don't just paste two former lesson plans together into one longer one.

Effect on Curriculum and Teaching Style

I was most interested in the perceived effects of change on curriculum and teaching style, going back to the warning from the Commission on Composition. There was no unanimous agreement.

Changes in Content

Teachers and students did not separate their comments between reading and writing in English classes when discussing the effects of the schedule on content. Reactions appear to be related to the teacher's belief about curriculum.

- Some teachers are concerned about losing total minutes over the former schedule, especially if they have gone from a six-period traditional schedule to a seven- or eight-period modified block schedule. Some regret what they see as having to pare down the content. On the other hand, some offer a version of one teacher's, "How many short stories do you have to read to understand short stories?"

- Some teachers perceive no change in curriculum, although they think that changes should have been made. There is some feeling that it is, in fact, possible to do what one has always done with minor modifications to accommodate the schedule. Many teachers who talked to me thought that the schedule change could serve as a catalyst for necessary curriculum changes—but that it hadn't.

Changes in Teaching and Classroom Interaction

More changes were noted in this area; almost all of them positive.

- Teachers feel that they have more time to get to know their students, except on the traditional block schedules where former semester-long courses were condensed to nine-weeks. There the teachers were concerned that students left just when the teachers were getting to know them.

- Changing the time structure should force changes in methods and materials, but it doesn't always.

- Teachers say they are doing more cooperative learning or group activities.

•There's more time for active learning. More than one teacher talked about the possibility of having students go outside the classroom to observe or to "find a poem" outdoors for a creative writing class. Field trips are easier to schedule because students miss fewer classes than on a traditional schedule.

•Longer planning periods mean more time to grade papers so they are often returned sooner. However, in the school on the traditional block schedule, teachers said the condensed time made returning papers quite stressful.

•The rotating schedule allows thinking time; time for projects to grow and develop.

•Some teachers implement Ted Sizer's idea of teacher as coach, student as worker. One told me, "I put some of the responsibility on them that I'd been taking on before. Instead of me doing the lecture or presentation I'm having students do more, more sharing of their writing, more small group, more sharing time."

•Teachers say that they can do more in-depth writing assignments, noting that in a 45-minute period, by the time you take roll and so on, you have only about 25 minutes left.

•Teachers advise that it's necessary to have a lot of different activities that you can do in a class period, but note that's the case on any schedule.

On the whole, the change to a schedule with 90-minute blocks of time appears to have advantages for curriculum and instruction.

Potential Problems

No change comes without disadvantages, though. The following comments are quotes or paraphrases from English teachers about traditional and rotating block schedules. Where the comment appears to be related specifically to one kind of schedule, I've noted that.

•One teacher said that a disadvantage was that there seemed to be more paperwork. Students do more activities, more writing, and want their teachers to see it all. Even if the teacher doesn't grade everything he or she has to shuffle through all the papers. [traditional block]

•On a traditional block schedule, there is a problem accommodating electives such as newspaper that need to meet all year and Advanced Placement English as long as the College Board will give only one testing date.

•Kids who move in and leave during the year are at a disadvantage because they have missed so much material. [traditional block]

•Time lost (by comparison to a seven-period day with 45-minute periods) means not covering as much material.

•Some teachers believe that it's easier for the teacher but not for the students because of the intensity of learning, the need to sit for 90 minutes, or the course load if students are taking seven classes.

•Some teachers believe that students who are marginal are making up less work because the amount missed in a 90-minute period is overwhelming.

•Some teachers do not agree that "less is more."

•Some teachers understand that it's difficult for the student to be absent.

•In one case, the number of outside novels had to be cut in half in one system with a traditional block schedule. Teachers note that students just cannot read the number of pages necessary even if they have homework for only four classes. "The days don't become 48 hours just because students are with teachers twice as long."

•"The classes are long and the kids lose thought towards the last thirty minutes."

Students also had comments on the disadvantages of the schedule:
•"more homework"

•"hard to keep focused for such a long period of time"

•"Some teachers lecture the whole hour and a half."

• "Block schedules help students, but teachers must make the class interesting or attention will be lost."

Advantages
On the whole, though, either kind of block schedule is perceived as having more advantages than disadvantages by both teachers and students.

•Teacher workload is reduced. On either schedule, teachers see only 90 to 110 students a day. On the traditional block schedule, teachers are responsible for only 90 to 100 students every nine weeks.

•A 90-minute period gives time for presentations. Students become more responsible for their learning.

▸One teacher finds that it is easier to remediate because she has a longer time with the students.

▸Another teacher says that it is easier to keep the attention of basic skills students—students appreciate the break to concentrate on only a few classes at a time.

▸Additional quotations from teachers and students:

"I think it was one of the easiest transitions I ever made and I thought it was going to be so difficult."

"There is more time to learn and more time to ask questions."

"The block schedule is less hectic—you're not running from class to class every 45 minutes. It helps to have two nights to do your homework—even though the teachers give you more. All the teachers really emphasize that 1 block day is really 2 regular days. It's really hard to miss a day of school. You miss lecture, notes, discussions, things you can't make up after school."

"I personally like this system a lot. Teachers get to know you better and you have a longer period to do your homework and to go to the teacher for help. I don't think people in sports would get along as well at our school if we didn't have this program."

Effects on Achievement

I asked students and teachers about the effects of the schedule on student achievement in English. The percentage of students answering that the schedule did or did not affect their achievement in particular areas and some of their written responses follow. The numbers of respondents are too small to be statistically significant. However, I think the proportions and the written comments are indicative and could be useful in designing future studies.

I asked teachers, *What effects have you seen on achievement?* and I asked students three specific questions on achievement. Responses to *How has this schedule affected your achievement in English classes?* follow.

▸There is an important discrepancy in the student answers to this question. Students from the school on the traditional block schedule overwhelmingly responded that their achievement was either no better or, in two cases, had suffered. Of 44 responses total, 5 (11%) students did not answer or made unrelated remarks. Nineteen students (43%), including only 5 from the traditional block school said that their achievement had increased. Twenty students (45%) said that they were doing worse or that the schedule had had no effect; fourteen (70%) of those responses were from the one school on a

traditional block schedule where all but two said merely that the schedule had had no effect. Students say:

> ▸"It has made my grades better because I can put more into my work and not have to rush everything."
>
> ▸"Well I'm not much of an English fan but having this extra time has improved my performance in English greatly. It has taken my grades over the three years from Ds to Bs."

There is limited quantitative data available regarding achievement.

> ▸One teacher had taught the same writing course for sophomores at all three schools in his district and gave the same type of test every semester. He found that students on the regular block schedule scored higher on the test than students on traditional schedules ever had in any of the three schools before they changed their schedules.
> ▸I taught speed reading on both a traditional schedule and a modified block. Students began the course with a standardized pre-test and then at the end of nine weeks, students took a standardized post-test. In between they practiced speed reading novels and nonfiction. The first year on a modified block schedule, we had time for students to read only six books instead of nine. However, post-test scores were as good or better than any previous semester.
> ▸In a school with a standardized writing assessment, the teachers believe that writing scores haven't changed for either better or worse.

I also asked students, *How has this schedule affected your writing ability?* From schools on both kinds of schedules, the response was overwhelming that longer class periods were an advantage in improving writing. Twenty-seven students (61%) noted improvements; fifteen (34%) noted no improvement; and two (5%) did not answer. Teachers and students said:

> ▸In writing, students and teachers say that writing improves because students have more time to practice in class, there is more time for conferencing between students and with the teacher, and, in fact, there is more time to think.
> ▸One teacher commented, "I feel that I have a better grasp on the different levels at which all of my students are writing—maybe because I have fewer students."
> ▸One creative writing teacher explained that in creative writing, students do a lot of draft writing and getting peer reactions and evaluations. To learn techniques, the teacher has to present them for about 15 to 20 minutes. In a 45-minute class, that's half the class. By the time they implement it, the class is over. In a 90-minute class it's more like a workshop. They implement the technique and get feedback right away. In addition, writers need a place to do it. A lot of students don't have that place at home so they try to do a lot of that

writing at school. If they only have a 45-minute period and, say they get 15 minutes to write, they're not going to get that place. In a longer time period, the teacher can create an atmosphere conducive to writing and thinking.

- Another teacher on the traditional block schedule sees benefits for the writer. "Block scheduling as a whole benefits the writer because they only have four classes and so they can spend more time on the writing. Now, if they were taking six classes or seven classes in a regular schedule . . . and five of them are difficult and you've got homework in each of them, you're not going to spend more than 20, 30 minutes on your writing and that's not really very much time. But if you could double that to 45 minutes to an hour in a block schedule then you're getting a lot more scrutinizing into it."
- The longer time period provided by either block schedule fits better with the writing process approach. One teacher said that the process of writing means that you're going to have to look at what you've already written and revise from there. If you only have 30 minutes to write something, you don't have much to start with, then if you spend time rereading it, you don't have much time left to revise.
- A student notes: "It has made it [my writing] better because I have my work done and don't have to cut class because I haven't finished."

I wondered if the schedule had affected achievement in reading and understanding literature and asked students, *How has this schedule affected your ability to read and understand literature?*
Twenty-three students (52%) said they appreciated the extra time available to read and discuss literature; nineteen (43%) said that the schedule had no effect on their ability; two (5%) made no comment.

Again, a troubling number of negative responses came from students at the school on the traditional block schedule. Of the positive responses, 39% of the total were from this school, but ten of the "no effect" responses (53%) came from students there. In fact, three remarked that they felt rushed. One said, "I have to read literature much faster because we have less time." Another, who said that her ability had probably stayed about the same, added "Although when we do read books, we fly through them, talk about it, then go on to something else." Without knowing the students or the class, it is dangerous to make generalizations about the schedule based on this limited data. They could all be in honors-level classes where the reading load is greater no matter what the schedule. They could have been feeling especially stressed at the time in the semester that the survey was given. However, I think this area deserves further investigation before a school decides to adopt one schedule over another.

Conclusion
Students and teachers seem to regard the schedule change positively. They comment on the disadvantages, but seem willing to work those out within the new scheduling

structure rather than go back to shorter periods. One teacher who has been teaching 90-minute blocks just this year said, "I can't even remember what it was like to teach 50 minutes. The time seems to go so fast." When I asked students *What else would you like me to know about the schedule you have?* I received responses like the following:

- "I think it's a great schedule! I believe that we are learning more than other students that go to other schools." [traditional block]

- "I couldn't imagine school without it." [modified block]

Questions to Use in Evaluating a Block Schedule

Perceived results are important indicators of the effectiveness of a schedule change such as those described in this report. Statistical indicators, when available, are another source of data to evaluate the schedule—some schools have large-scale surveys, attendance rates, student gpa or honor roll figures, numbers of disciplinary referrals, and standardized test scores. All can be examined for changes with the understanding that the schedule alone might not be responsible for all of the changes. I found that schools often changed more than just the schedule when they implemented the schedule change; thus, other factors could cause positive or negative effects.

A third source of data, beyond perceptions and statistics, would be a comparison of the effects of the schedule to outside indicators such as expectations or research on best practices. Did the schedule achieve what the designers expected it to? Does this schedule allow teachers to teach in ways that are advocated by the subject matter organizations and supported by research in best practices? The following questions might serve as additional ways to examine the effectiveness of a block schedule.

1. What did you expect to occur by changing to a block schedule?
2. How has the schedule met or failed to meet your expectations?
3. In content and delivery, what has the extended learning time (i.e., 90-minute period) allowed you to do?
4. In content and delivery, what has the extended learning time prevented you from doing?
5. In content and delivery, what has the alternating day (or every day) model allowed you to do?
5. In content and delivery, what has the alternating day (or every day) model prevented you from doing?
6. In what ways are class periods qualitatively different on this schedule (i.e., discussions have more depth, critical thinking is more evident)?
7. In what ways are class periods quantitatively different on this schedule (i.e., fewer works read, more essays written)?
8. What are the major tenets of learning in your area (i.e., grammar instruction should be integrated with the teaching of composition; talking is a valuable means to learn)? In what ways does the schedule assist or prevent you from meeting those?
9. Is there a need for greater student-teacher contact than you can currently achieve? In what ways can the schedule assist in meeting that need?
10. What impact has the schedule change had on teacher planning? Is planning time adequate or can adjustments be made?
11. What student products do you have to support positive or negative claims about the schedule (i.e., writing samples, transcripts of class or small group discussions)?
12. What do parents say?

Resources

Personal and Electronic Resources

The best resource is another school that's implementing a schedule you're interested in. To get names of schools, try sending a message to a listserv or other electronic source. I received a few names when I logged onto ASKERIC. When I uploaded a request to one of NCTE's listservs, I received several replies. If you have Internet access, subscribe to English-teachers@uxl.cso.uiuc.edu by sending an email message to **majordomo@uxl.cso.uiuc.edu.** The message should be **subscribe English-teachers@uxl.cso.uiuc.edu**

People on that listserv who said you could contact them are:
Sharon Hurwitz
shurwitz@pen.k12.va.us
This school is on a six period rotating block schedule.

Jay Crosby
Hueneme High School
500 Bard Road
Oxnard, CA 93033
805-385-2500
CAJAYJAY@aol.com
This school is on a traditional block schedule with four periods a day.

Others who have told me to invite people to contact them:
Hugh Patterson
Chairman
English Department
Commack High School
Scholar Lane
Commack, NY 11725
516-754-7294
willyeats@aol.com

P. Ellen Tatalias
Language Arts Chairperson
Northwestern Lehigh School District
6493 Rte. 309
New Tripoli, PA 18066-9409
610-298-8931

You can contact Wasson High School in Colorado Springs, CO by writing to **wassonhs.aol.com** The word is that they are good and helpful.

You might also contact your state department of education to see if they know of anyone in the state who is studying or using a nontraditional schedule.

Print Resources—Middle School

Center of Education for the Young Adolescent
A partnership with University of Wisconsin-Platteville/UW-Extension/Department of Public Information

129 Doudna Hall
1 University Plaza
Platteville, Wisconsin 53818-3099

(608) 342-1276

They sent me copies of about 20 schedules from middle schools along with an article and two chapters from a book about scheduling the middle school. They also have a resource guide/catalog available. There is a postage and handling charge of $9 a pound for materials such as the ones I requested, but for some reason they generously waived the charge.

Alam, Dale and Roger E. Seick, Jr. "A Block Schedule With a Twist." *Phi Delta Kappan*, May 1994: 732-733.

This article describes an Intensive Core Program in a Colorado middle school. As one option, eighth graders could enroll in this plan wherein they studied a single content area for four period each day, had lunch and three electives. The periods were 45 minutes in length and, at the end of 4 and 1/2 weeks the students switch to a different core content area and keep their electives. The reactions from teachers, parents and students were largely positive.

Print Resources—District and High Schools

Anderson, Julia. "Alternative Approaches to Organizing the School Day and Year." *The School Administrator*, March 1994: 8-15.

Anderson is the Deputy Executive Director of the National Education Commission on Time and Learning. In this article, she summarizes key elements of the report of that commission [see below for the citation of the report] and profiles four schools using alternative scheduling models. One of them is a block schedule.

Carroll, Joseph M. "The Copernican Plan Evaluated: The Evolution of a Revolution." *Phi Delta Kappan*. October 1994: 105-113.

Carroll is a superintendent emeritus in Massachusetts and a strong advocate of the Copernican Plan. In this article he outlines the plan, details his efforts to get it instituted as a pilot program, lists extensive findings regarding the advantages of the program, and briefly mentions the ultimate lack of community support. This article is stands out from all of the others because he has data on numerous factors such as attendance, graduation rates, and academic performance. The most difficult part of implementing a new schedule is finding hard data to prove its benefits. His article at least provides a good starting point.

Kosanovic, Gerald E. *Retooling the Instructional Day: A Collection of Scheduling Models.* Available as item 2109403 for $9.00 (nonmembers) from the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

I haven't seen this yet, but a principal recommended it to me. The catalog description says that it contains several schedules "including modified traditional schedules, block schedules, modified block schedules, and modular schedules."

National Education Commission on Time and Learning. *Prisoners of Time*. April 1994. U.S. Government Printing Office.

This report advocates longer school days and longer school years. The members of the commission visited numerous schools and held hearings to prepare their report. The message is strong: "American students will have their best chance at success when they are no longer serving time, but when time is serving them." I liked reading this report for the concepts about time and learning, although I certainly do not agree with everything in it. It's well worth ordering from the Superintendent of Documents.

Willis, Scott. "Are Longer Classes Better?" *ASCD Update*. Newsletter of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, March 1993: 1,3.

Willis focuses on high school block schedules. He discusses three schools—one in British Columbia and two in Massachusetts. [The October 1994 *Kappan* article tells more about one of the Massachusetts schools.] Again, students and teachers were happy with the new schedule. In two communities, parents were worried about the changes and, in one of them, they forced the end of the plan.